

THE SPIRITUAL ISSUES OF THE WAR

BRITISH INFORMATION SERVICE
30 ROCKEFELLER PLAZA
NEW YORK, N. Y.

OBJECTS:

1. To provide for readers at home and abroad information concerning the life and thought of the British Churches in wartime.
2. To elucidate by news and quotations the spiritual issues at stake in the war.

Number 173

FEBRUARY 25th, 1943

THE NAZIS AND CHRISTIAN FESTIVALS

An examination of the German press for the Christmas season reveals what looks like a concerted plan to empty the Christmas festival of its Christian content and to replace this with a purely nationalistic interpretation in terms of ancient folk lore.

A number of papers take an almost identical line. They say in effect: "Christmas existed long before Christianity as an ancient German festival. The Christian Church has adapted this festival for its own purposes, but its real meaning lies deeper and is to be found in the primeval celebrations of the winter solstice, a festival of the Germanic race."

Thus *Deutscher Glaube*, an organ of the German Faith movement, wrote in its December number:—

"We cannot separate Christmas from thoughts of peace and love. Peace is the condition of that quiet and abiding creativeness out of which the great civilisations of history grow. This is the meaning of the Indo-German Saga of the King of Peace, of the Nordic *Frodi*, under whose government perfect peace reigned and in whose time the fields brought forth abundant fruit. . . . So also in the time of our German forbears the time of the turning of the year was regarded as holy. This can be historically traced in the Nordic *Julfest*. The twelve nights between the longest night and the recognisable lengthening of daylight were regarded as especially holy. Our word 'Weihnacht'—holy night—comes from that. Even at that time Christmas was a season of peace and love in which all enmities were put aside, foes were reconciled and people gave each other tokens of friendship and love.

"For this reason it was possible for Christianity to link on its message of Peace on Earth to this old German festival, and to proclaim the Birth of the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ, as its special content. This was prepared for in the early Church, for from the fourth century onwards the Birth of Jesus in the stall of Bethlehem was celebrated on the day when the Romans celebrated the birthday of the new unconquerable Sun, the 'Sol Invictus.'

"So the Church adapted itself to the old Indo-German Feast of Sunbirth, Peace and Love. With this Christian content the Christmas festival has taken a special place in the hearts of the German people for centuries. Nowhere in the whole world has the Christmas festival had so rich and deep a meaning as in German lands. For the form and content of this festival are older than Christianity. Therefore the old sacred meaning and value which it has for the German soul must not collapse with the collapse of Christian beliefs and values. Jesus Christ was only one symbol of eternal love, just as Buddha was another. The meaning of Christmas can be won anew, for the roots of this festival lie much deeper in our foundations than the roots of the Christian Christmas. Germanic man believes in Peace and Love not only as set forth in one Person such as Jesus Christ, but as the eternal, continual self-revealing powers of God, which move in the world and work in the hearts of men."

Such teaching is not altogether surprising in a paper like *Deutscher Glaube*, but the same point of view was expressed in ordinary papers such as the *Aachener Anzeiger* and the

Donauzeitung. Doubtless many other papers carried the same line of propaganda.

CHRISTIAN DOCTORS REFUSE TO JOIN NAZI "PHYSICIANS' CHAMBER" IN HOLLAND

So uncompromising is the resistance of all Dutch doctors to the Nazis' effort to drive them into their "Physicians' Chamber" that Dr. K. Keyer, the leader of the Nazi medical front in Holland, has published this mixture of threat and appeal in the *Nationale Dagblad* of January 22nd, 1943:—

"With that quiet self-confidence which emanates from our outlook on life we shall take measures against anyone who impedes the National Socialist medical programme formulated for the Netherlands. Nothing less than the health of our people is at stake, and in future we shall tolerate no irresponsible experiments in this sphere.

"Again, but now for the last time, I invite all those in the health services to co-operate, while I on my part am now willing to overlook mistakes which they have made in the past."

The Medical Men's Answer

In the meantime, a document has come into the possession of the Netherlands Government Information Bureau in London, illustrating the doctors' attitude in the matter. Its main points are:—

In this "Physicians' Chamber" the Christian doctor sees above all the executive organ of a totalitarian world outlook, the ultimate intention of which is completely to dominate each individual doctor, without exception. The National Socialist outlook, by reason of its totalitarian structure and tendency, can recognise no particular sphere or relation in social or spiritual life over which in the last instance it has no control. Therefore it claims to dominate the relation between the doctor and his patient.

Refusal to Kill

When National Socialism now wants to bind the Netherlands doctor to its executive organs in order to serve its purpose the Christian doctor will see in this above all an assault on his relations with his fellow being which are entrusted to him by God.

When National Socialism compels Netherlands doctors to diminish the chances of life or even kill the mentally afflicted in the "interest of the community," the Christian doctor sees in this, above all, that charity is

to make way for the National Socialist idea of "the interests of the community," and an implied demand to commit murder, which is an absolute denial of the deepest meaning of the Gospel.

When National Socialism calls upon Netherlands doctors to co-operate in certain measures designed to guarantee the purity of the race, for instance, by sterilising fellow citizens against their will, the Christian doctor (particularly if he is a Dutchman) must refuse his collaboration on human and scientific grounds. In the organisation which calls upon him to do such things, he will primarily see an expression of the creed, which, in its deification of race, blood and soil, is to him, as a Christian, nothing but pure paganism.

And when National Socialism, or the "Physicians' Chamber," after all preliminary tactical efforts to induce doctors in Holland to co-operate, fails to achieve its purpose in this way, and finally resorts to compulsion and force, the Christian doctor will not only be convinced that on ethical, scientific and humanitarian grounds general resistance against this tyranny which assaults honour and conscience is more than ever imperative. For him the main issue as a Christian is his duty to God and his fellow being. For the sake of this he has to risk all, even his very existence, because he knows that the true and only meaning of his life as a Christian lies in the observance of this commandment.

Unconditional Rejection

In the circumstances the Christian will have to reject unconditionally, on principle, any form of consultation, compromise or co-operation with the medical organisation which embodies this totalitarian outlook of National Socialism. We have seen through the meaning of this ideology which for tactical reasons tries to mislead the guileless by plausible and "social sounding" phrases.

We say "No" and we shall continue to say "No" all along the line.

COUNCIL OF CHURCHES AND BEVERIDGE PLAN

In a statement on the Beveridge Report the executive committee of the British Council of Churches says:—

We believe that Christian people should and will welcome the proposals of the Beveridge Report as being in accord with

Christian principle. The proposals embody the principle of social solidarity in that they both require from the individual a contribution to his own security and call upon the more privileged members of the community to take a larger share in lifting the burden of insecurity which modern industrialism has laid on a section of their fellows. They thus express a new sense of community and should be supported by all who believe that we are "members one of another."

We do not concur in the view that what the report proposes would sap the springs of initiative and enterprise, believing rather that insecurity is in general more deadening than a reasonable measure of security.

It is no disparagement of the report to underline its own insistence that it deals with only one aspect of our social and economic problem. Of other evils which it distinguishes, but cannot discuss within its terms of reference, the most grievous is enforced idleness. From the religious standpoint this is as grave an infliction as insecurity. Material security is not to be regarded as an end in itself, but only as the means or basis of a fuller and more responsible life. Men need not only to be freed from want, but also to be occupied in useful and significant work if their moral nature is to be satisfied. Freedom from futility is as important as freedom from want.

The social insurance plan points to a planned social order; and the further we move in this direction, the more vigilant do we need to be as to the extent to which the inner and outer liberties of men, whether as individuals or in groups, are imperilled or enhanced. We believe that the threat to liberty incident to a planned economy will be less in proportion as industry is recognised as an instrument of a larger human purpose and organised in direct relation to it. This means that its personal aspect must be held in view no less than its material aspect, quality of life no less than economic security or financial gain.

We believe the enactment of the Beveridge proposals is urgently needed in order that the life of Britain may be rebuilt on firmer foundations of social justice. The grounds on which this judgment is based and its implications for related spheres of action are set out more fully in the statement of the Commission of the Churches (now merged in the British Council of Churches) entitled "Social Justice and Economic Reconstruction."

BRITAIN'S PARACHUTE CHAPLAINS

It is now widely known that British parachute troops have with them a number of chaplains, themselves trained as parachutists, and ready to go into action with their men.

The *Methodist Recorder* in a recent number published an interview with the Rev. R. Talbot Watkins. He and a Roman Catholic, the Rev. B. M. Egan, S.J., were the first to qualify as trained parachutists. They have been followed by Anglican and other chaplains.

After describing the vigorous training given to the men themselves, Mr. Watkins told his interviewer that the question arose in their minds as to whether the chaplains were to be anything more than sympathetic but inactive spectators. "That, we felt," said Mr. Watkins, "would be an intolerable position for a true padre; for not only could he not accompany his men into battle, but in his everyday relations with them he would be a stranger in the midst of men bound together by a unique experience from which he, the padre, was shut out. So we became convinced that in the vital interests of our spiritual work we, too, must share our men's air experiences, and train to become parachutists ourselves. I am intensely glad to be able to tell you that the Commander of this formation was from the very first not only willing but anxious that we should do so, and, the sanction of the War Office having been sought, our request was put through and granted. Here I may say that both Padre Egan and I had, previous to this, gone through a thorough ground training, so that as soon as the War Office permission came we were able to proceed at once to the seven parachute descents necessary to qualify for the coveted wings. The actual experience of waiting to go up in the aircraft, the tense atmosphere of the flight, the cold deliberation of the actual jump into space, and the exhilaration of a successful descent have often been described in print. So it is sufficient for me to say that the nervous and emotional stress is the same for all, chaplains included. Physical fitness and technical training are necessary in a high degree, but the tenseness of the experience arises from the fact that finally each man stands alone. The difference between the man who jumps and the man who refuses is that highest form of discipline—self-discipline; the mastery of oneself, of one's fear of the unknown, and of doing that which is contrary to a man's self-

preserving instinct. Yet one is not quite alone, for the knowledge that the next man looks as green as you feel, and yet succeeds, acts as a spur. Therein lies the sense of comradeship which is so characteristic of all parachutists.

"Since then all chaplains to airborne units have been volunteers and, as expansion has proceeded, a number, mainly Church of England, have trained as parachutists. But I must add that all who thus fly do so purely in the interests of their work as chaplains. So a door has been opened to the interest and sympathy of their men. As for the padre himself, he feels that he is no strange person set down in their midst, but rather is he among them as one who knows and shares their life and risky duty. On the men's side the expression takes the form of good-natured banter in which the last-war term of 'sky-pilot' often appears.

"But while this side of a parachute chaplain's life is unique, it is most emphatically not his main work. It is right that the evangelist should be 'all things to all men,' even if it means that to parachutists he should be a parachutist; but, as with the Great Apostle, it is the end to be achieved that matters—that the Gospel may be preached and men saved."

ANSALDO v. ORESTANO

The article in the Fascist paper *Gerarchia* by Orestano, quoted in *Spiritual Issues* No. 169 (in which German religious policy was sharply criticised), has evidently created a considerable impression in Italy itself, as well as in the camp of the United Nations.

The well-known Italian commentator Ansaldo, writing in his paper, *Telegrafo*, begins by telling us that "much approval has been accorded to the article." He pays lip service to the points made by Orestano. The idea that Germans should learn the secret of catholicity from the genius of Rome is, he says, "nobly thought and nobly expressed." But he goes on to say: "It is for the Germans to feel that this rapprochement is necessary; it is not for us to preach

it to them, in a more or less masterly and pedagogic manner. There are people in Germany who are perfectly aware of everything that Germany can learn from Rome. . . . Their words will possess an effectiveness as regards the development of German spiritual and political activity, which our words—even those of a man like Orestano—will never have."

We are not surprised that Orestano was rebuked for revealing so publicly a fissure in the spiritual front of the Axis.

BISHOP ENTHRONED IN RUINS OF COVENTRY CATHEDRAL

On Saturday, February 20th, an event occurred which has some symbolic significance in the history of British wartime religion.

It was the enthronement in the ruins of Coventry Cathedral of a new Bishop for that diocese.

Coventry Cathedral was destroyed by enemy action in November 1940. The walls of the great church still stand open to the sky, and great heaps of rubble mark the course of the once noble arcades. On a temporary altar a Cross has been erected consisting of two charred beams from the burnt church, while a simple processional Cross has been made from three great nails also salvaged from the ruins.

The Bishop-Elect, Dr. N. V. Gorton, was greeted at the entrance by the Provost, who informed him that "the cathedral church had been laid waste and its outward glory had departed for a season." To this the Bishop replied: "Our Lord has said, 'In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.'" Later the Bishop added: "It is my heart's desire that this cathedral church should rise again."

The Bishop was enthroned in an episcopal chair erected in the Crypt, after which the procession reformed and the service was completed in the neighbouring Church of Holy Trinity.

The Bishop was greeted by Free Church ministers in the course of the service.